

VZCZCXRO7378  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHSI #0657 0920926  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 020926Z APR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1304  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 000657

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/01/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PATRIARCH CALLS FOR CALM AHEAD OF APRIL 9  
PROTESTS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary. In an April 1 meeting, Georgian Orthodox Patriarch Ilia II expressed concern to the Ambassador that the approaching April 9 opposition protests could escalate into violence. The Patriarch said that President Saakashvili and nearly all the opposition leaders, including Alasania, had sought his advice. He told them that they should refrain from attacking each other verbally and physically, and to seek dialogue. The Patriarch made urging the government and the opposition to shun violence the focus of his March 29 sermon, noting that the domestic political situation was "reaching a critical threshold." The Patriarch himself was concerned that the Russians could use the protests as a means to foment disorder. Ilia II said that discussions were underway regarding a proposed meeting with his Russian counterpart in Sochi soon in order to bring the Georgian and Russian sides closer together. The Patriarch also mentioned that he will travel to Strasbourg in upcoming months to seek support from the EU for Georgia, and that he had been invited to Iran. End Summary.

#### April 9 Protests

12. (C) Ilia II spent an hour with the Ambassador discussing his concerns about the April 9 protests. He said that President Saakashvili had met with him, and nearly every major opposition leader, including Irakli Alasania, had asked for his guidance. The Ambassador told the Patriarch that he is concerned that people who follow events in Georgia from the United States and Europe are tiring of the constant Georgian political infighting. Some may lose interest if it continues. The Patriarch said that he was confident that dialogue would ultimately triumph, but wondered if this was a "rite of passage" that needed to be crossed before dialogue became an option. Ambassador said that he had recently done an interview with Rustavi 2 television station in which he called for calm and urged all sides to work together for the country. So far, the opposition "maximalists" (as the Patriarch called them) had turned a deaf ear. The Patriarch said he thinks the United States should continue to clarify that it supports the institution of the Georgian president, and not individual personalities. Additionally, all the countries who support Georgia should work to make the Caucasus a region of peace by continuing their partnerships.

#### Possible Visit to Iran

13. (C) The Patriarch said that Iran's Ambassador to Georgia had invited him to visit Iran. Ilia II asked how he could help the United States during such a visit. The Patriarch believed that Russia could be helpful with convincing the Iranians to abandon their nuclear ambitions.

#### Comment

14. (C) The Patriarch has been the voice of calm and reason on many tumultuous occasions in Georgia and the Ambassador

requested this meeting after several political figures had suggested that only the Patriarch had a potential voice that might be heard by both government and opposition leaders. Just as he has in past meetings, the Patriarch expressed appreciation for the visit and said he would continue to help in whatever way he could to encourage dialogue between the political forces. He thanked the Ambassador for his efforts to encourage dialogue. During this particular visit, the Patriarch said he felt better after his medical treatment in Germany and a recent vacation by the Black Sea, but he appeared shaky and his voice trembled when he spoke.

TEFFT